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Relation to the British Empire



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THE
AUSTRALIAN COMMONWEALTH
AND HER RELATION TO
THE BRITISH EMPIRE

An Address delivered by
THE RIGHT HON. SIR GEORGE REID
G.C.M.G., K.C., D.C.L.

TO THE

CANADIAN CLUB OF OTTAWA

AT A LUNCHEON GIVEN IN THE CHATEAU LAURIER
ON MONDAY, 9TH SEPTEMBER

1912



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THE AUSTRALIAN COMMONWEALTH

AND HER RELATION TO

THE BRITISH EMPIRE

The CHAIRMAN, Mr. W. J. Gerald: Gentlemen,—The Canadian Club is honoured in having as its guest to-day the Right Honourable Sir George Reid, High Commissioner for Australia in London. (Applause.) Sir George will address the Club members on the subject of "Australia, and her relation to the Empire." In looking about me I see many business men whose time cannot well be devoted to remarks made by your Chairman, and I therefore refrain and simply call upon Sir George to address this meeting. (Loud applause.)

AUSTRALIA AND HER RELATION TO THE EMPIRE.

Sir GEORGE REID said:—Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen:—

I must say that this brilliant and crowded audience in Ottawa takes me most pleasantly by surprise. I faithfully represent to you the feelings of the people of Australia when I say that they have for the people of Canada feelings of the liveliest esteem, affection and admiration. (Applause.)

I would like, gentlemen, to ask your attention for a moment or two to the country from which I come. You know how far away it is from the busy centres of the Old World. It is the only British continent. Ninety-six per cent. of the people of Australia were either born in the British Isles or are the children of or descendants from people born in the British Isles. (Hear, hear.) That reminds me of one of the brightest glories of the Imperial power. The British is the one great empire the world has ever known which has been generous enough, and sagacious enough, not to seek to suppress nationalities beneath its flag. When you look at the French-Canadians of to-day

you must recollect that the Mother Country has never tried to suppress the nationality of the French Canadians; the Mother Country has never tried, by insidious or indirect means, to sap their national character and traditions. If there is a people on the face of the globe who ought to be loyal to the British Crown it is the French Canadian people, (applause). They are a loyal people. (Hear, hear, and applause.) They are a generous and enlightened people. It must be a source of deep satisfaction to them that the traditional hatreds, antagonisms and wars, which used to prevail between the people of the Mother Country and the people of France, have disappeared forever, (applause), and that they stand together in the face of the world firm friends, and, although there is no formal compact, I think I may also say, true and staunch allies. (Applause.)

Now, Australia. It is a larger country than the United States; so that you see it has got a large space upon the face of the globe. Canada and Australia together represent seven-twelfths of the whole vast area of the British Empire.

Now, climate. We have hot times there (laughter); but we are never put under the snow for six months in the year. (Laughter.) As I said at a Canadian dinner in London, you all thank God for that, and we Australians thank God you have (laughter) but we also thank God we have not. (Laughter.) Australia is one of the healthiest countries on the face of the globe. New Zealand and Australia have together the lowest death-rate of all. Our rainfall is not as plentiful as we would like, but there is a space in Australia which has a rainfall of over twenty inches a year, as large as Germany, France, Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, Portugal and Belgium, combined, and you can grow wheat out in Australia with a rainfall of from 12 to 15 inches.

Then, I think Australia is one of the greatest landowners in the world. Ninety-three per cent. of her three million square miles still belong to the people. (Applause.) Then I want you to remember this: We have only 4,600,000 men, women and children. Canada has nearly eight millions of people; so that you must make some allowances for us. We have 4,600,000 men, women and children spread over that vast continent of three million square miles.

As to the resources of Australia, I think you all know pretty well what they are. We can grow anything, from the productions of the colder climates to the productions of the tropical regions. We have a commerce which is expanding at a phenomenal rate. We have untold stores of mineral wealth, and auriferous areas of many thousands of square miles. Who can doubt that the dazzling discoveries of the past will be repeated? Then we have vast stores of coal, tin, copper, silver—the richest silver mines in the world, buried right in the heart of the continent.

We all hate figures; but I do want to give you some figures which will incidentally show you what our resources are, beside showing what our recent progress has been.

I think we are about 200 years younger than Canada (laughter). Of course you spent several hundred years in fighting; we have never done that. (Laughter). We have as many horses in Australia already as you have in Canada or they have in Great Britain. We have a million head more cattle than you have in Canada. We have ninety-five millions of sheep. I think that is a few millions more than you have in Canada (laughter). Canadians are so patriotic that I cannot get anybody to tell me how many sheep you really have. (Loud laughter.) Our ninety-five millions of sheep produce no less than 800,000,000 pounds' weight of the finest wool in the world. Then, in agriculture, we have twelve million acres already under many kinds of cultivation, wheat being the chief crop. Of minerals the annual production is over \$120,000,000 a year. Manufactures do not flourish so readily or quickly in a young country as the primary industries—still we have a splendid variety of manufactures, which has reached \$600,000,000 a year in value, and that output has increased during the last three years by 39 per cent. I think that a phenomenal rate of progress, especially when you remember our distance from the great consuming populations of the world. There are 287,000 hands in Australian factories, and in three years there has been an increase of 42,000 hands, that is, 17 per cent. in three years. Our banks have deposits amounting to \$720,000,000. The increase in two years in our bank deposits is \$130,000,000, or 18 per cent. Our savings banks have, in addition to those figures, deposits

of \$300,000,000, and there are no less than—and when you consider our population, it is a remarkable total—there are no less than 1,600,000 individual accounts in the savings banks of Australia. Every man and woman in Australia can claim if need be a liberal old age pension when 65, and can get it before if they break down and are unable to work.

Then railways. I think one of the grandest things about Canada is the marvellous enterprise which you have shown in railway construction. I think some of your railways are among the grandest monuments of man's enterprise on the face of the world to-day. (Applause.) But we have already 18,000 miles of rail, 2,000 private and 16,000 miles belonging to the people. (Applause.) In spite of the fact that those railways were authorized by political bodies, I am glad to be able to tell you that, taking the whole of these public railways of 16,000 miles, they yield already enough to pay all working expenses, all renewals, all the interest on the loans borrowed for their construction, and return besides a surplus of 1,000,000 pounds sterling into the public treasury. (Applause.) If that is so in the very beginnings of Australia, you can imagine the untold wealth which awaits the Australian railway system in the future. There are no dividends, of course, to be paid; as the railways increase in prosperity the rates on the passages and the freights go down. (Applause.)

Our trade. Our imports are \$335,000,000, our exports \$400,000,000—a total trade of \$735,000,000. I am very glad to be able to tell the loyal men of Canada that—far removed as we are from the ancestral home—in our trade 75 per cent. of all our purchases from the world are bought within the British Empire. (Applause.) Twenty-five per cent. of our trade goes to all the rest of the world; and when you remember that there are many large articles of import which must be bought from foreign countries, for natural reasons, I think you will admit that Australia is showing in the practical sphere of commercial and industrial life the magnificent loyalty which she feels for the British Empire. (Applause.)

One of the finest things, I think, in the public policy of Canada was that handsome tariff preference you gave to the people of the

Mother Country. You led the way there most nobly, and I think it will always remain to the credit of that illustrious Canadian statesman, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, (loud applause) that he carried that great measure. You are fortunate in Canada in your public men. You have got a splendid Prime Minister now, (hear, hear, and applause) and you had a splendid Prime Minister before. (Applause.) And I can see in the Ministers several other men who would make splendid Prime Ministers if typhoid made any further mischief in Ottawa. (Applause and laughter.)

The British Empire does not buy as much from us as we buy from the British Empire. We buy only 25 per cent. from foreign countries, but we sell 39 per cent of our production to foreign countries and only 61 per cent. to the British Empire. So that you see the balance of trade is all on the loyal side. (Laughter.) We give a preference to the Mother Country which costs \$5,000,000 a year in hard cash. There are suggestions for reciprocity and preference by acts of Parliament which, I think, elicit warm support from Australia, as from Canada; but, just as Australia and Canada won't let the Mother Country shape their customs policy, so we are men enough not to try to force the point against the conviction of the British people. (Hear, hear.) The time may come when the majority of the people of the Mother Country may find our ideas to be in their interest, too. But I will tell you what occurs to me: There is one way of enjoying the blessings of reciprocity and preference without waiting for those acts of Parliament that may never come. Why can't every man of us in the British Empire, every day, give a preference in his purchases to the Empire? (Hear, hear, and applause.) Why should not there be a trade mark for the British Empire which would enable us, wherever we are, to give that preference? If I were living in a village in Canada—in my political career I was always a great Free Trader, but as an official—I don't know what I am. (Laughter.) But I want to say this, and I think it is a creed we can all agree about—If I were living in a small village in Canada I would buy everything I could from the people in my own village. (Hear, hear.) Local patriotism is at the very heart of all the patriotisms of the British Empire. If I could not get what I wanted in

the village or town, or country I live in I would get it in the Empire; and if I could not get it in the Empire, then, in the name of heaven, let us give the rest of the world a chance! (Laughter.) If we act on those lines there is no country that can justly complain, because the Old Country and the rest of the Empire are faced by barricades all over the trade routes of the world.

Is this a difficult thing? Could not the great divisions of the Empire legislate for an Imperial trade mark of this kind; one with "made in the British Empire," on the outer circle, the inner circle having "made in Canada," or Australia, or Great Britain, the centre containing the trade mark of the individual whose production it was? Because you can never efface that; you must always have the trade mark of the firm that produced the article or its reputation would be worth nothing and its skill would get no reward, and a bad make would have the same favour as a good one. By an Imperial trade mark with those, you could, I think, carry out in a simple and effective way the project of British Empire preference and reciprocity.

I will tell you another thing about Australia. We are far away from the storm centres of the world. We are geographically the very extremity of this mighty British Empire whose gigantic frame stretches from the North Sea, down in the case of Australia, almost to the South Pole. I only wish the rest of the body of the British Empire were as lively as its toes are, in the way of defence. We have got an Australian fleet. What do you think of that? (Laughter, loud applause and cheers.) We are twelve years old only, you know. You are a lusty 45. We are twelve years old and we have got an Australian fleet, flying the white ensign. But we have got our own flag, mind you, on the front of the ship. (Laughter and applause.) You know, young communities will spend—if you will allow me to say this. (Turning to Hon. Mr. Foster) Pull me off if I get into your politics. Young communities, like children, will spend ever so much more on a thing of their own than they will in buying anything for the old man. (Laughter.) We Australians in these three years have spent \$65,000,000 on defence, naval and military. Every boy in Australia has, some time in the year, to wear the uniform of the King, (applause); but he is not taken away from industry, you know.

I have never been one of those who think that a country will grow truly great by putting millions of her youths into barracks for two or three years; but the compulsory training in Australia is of the lenient kind, which can be no real hardship to the youngsters. We have got a fleet that gives young Australia a chance of obeying the call of the sea. Do not forget that most of our glory and most of our conquests came from the exploits of our race upon the high seas. (Applause.) We are so prosperous in Australia, and you are so prosperous in Canada, that our young men do not go to the sea as readily as used to be the case; but it would be a sad day for Australia, and perhaps for Canada, if we do not find some young Australians and some young Canadians on the deck of ships that travel the high seas. (Applause.)

That is all I want to say about Australia exclusively. I want now to talk about the Old Country. I want to remind you of what Great Britain did for us. She gave us the right of managing our own affairs. What other empire on the face of the world ever acted so magnanimous a part? Can you remember one? I do not think so. She gave us the right to do that which runs in the veins of the race. Hundreds of years ago, in the ancient boroughs of England, a genius for self-government began to display itself, and it is that to which the greatness of our empire is mainly to be attributed. We not only got the noblest of all Imperial gifts—self-government—but we got more than that. Great Britain gave us another noble Imperial gift—the magnificent continent we possess, with all its resources and all its wealth. (Applause.)

There is another grand thing about Great Britain. In spite of her magnificent gifts she never comes cap in hand to ask us to acknowledge her great generosity and give her something in return. (Hear, hear, and applause.) I think the noblest thing of all about those people in the British Isles is this, that vast multitudes of them are poor, poor beyond the conception of the prosperous Canadians and Australians; they are staggering under the vast responsibilities of this Empire which covers so much of the earth's surface, and whose commerce flies across every ocean on the face of the globe, yet in the midst of their anxieties, in the midst of their troubles, they make

no appeal to us for help; they do not ask us to do anything for them.

The elevation of national self-respect which makes that statement true will surely redouble the strength and fervour of the love and gratitude which the men of Canada and the men of Australia feel for the people of the British Isles. (Loud applause.)

Only another thing. I want to refer for a moment to the relations of the Dominions to the Empire. We often forget, I think, what this British Empire really is. We are sometimes apt to regard the British Empire as if it consisted of the people of Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the white people in South Africa. There never was a more tremendous mistake! The subjects of the King number 420 millions, and 360 millions of His Majesty's subjects are neither of our colour, nor of our race. We have also to remember the exquisite delicacy and complexity of Imperial diplomacy in relation to all the nations whose boundaries merge with the boundaries of our Empire. We must never forget the phenomenal strain upon human sagacity, talent and patriotism which is involved in governing those 360 millions of aliens without infringing more than is necessary their individual freedom or ancient customs whilst maintaining amongst them the rules of British justice and the safety of life, virtue and property. (Applause.)

We have heard a number of eloquent appeals for some new form of Imperial Federation. I would be delighted if some of our statesmen who have this matter so earnestly in their minds would produce even the barest outline of a scheme for carrying this out. It is easy to talk about tying the bonds which unite us more closely together; but if you asked me to submit such a scheme, likely to preserve and promote the harmony of the Empire, I would ask you to go to my friends the Canadian Ministers. (Laughter.) If they have some scheme which would do that, I think the whole Empire will acclaim them as benefactors. The onus upon those who wish to make changes is tremendous. The harmony of the Empire as it stands to-day is one of the miracles of human experience. We think it wonderful that majestic bodies in the heavens should revolve round the central sun. Well, that is not more marvellous than the orderly orbits in

the political heavens of the various constellations of our Imperial system. The law of gravitation of the solar system is a great mystery and so are the marvellous peace and order which prevail right over this Empire. Some American poet said to someone, "Hitch your waggon to a star." But if you could hitch your waggon to the star, where would you and your waggon soon be ? (Laughter.)

One of the secrets—not a secret—one of the marvels of the relations between the self-governing Dominions and the Mother Country has been this, that as every tie was removed there was more loyalty, more attachment. And there is so much to be done in the Empire, in Canada, in Australia, there is so much to be done in developing the latent strength of these grand communities that we cannot, while we are waiting for the scheme, do better than pursue our present course. Just think of the triumphs of enterprise, of progress and development, making for the strength of the empire, which Canada is achieving! Just think of the marvellous development in Australia and New Zealand and even South Africa, to say nothing of the majestic Indian Empire. If we will only develop each for ourselves the grandeur of our resources, if we will only make our own people happy and prosperous and well governed, we will, I think, be promoting in one of the best possible ways the health, strength and prosperity of the whole British Empire. (Loud and prolonged applause.)

THE CHAIRMAN:—Gentlemen, you have all heard, I am sure, with pleasure and interest the address given by our guest, Sir George Reid, and I feel confident that I am incapable of adequately expressing on your behalf the thanks you desire to extend to him. I am therefore going to call upon the Honourable Mr. Foster to express for the Club its appreciation of the magnificent address to which we have just listened. (Applause.)

HON. MR. FOSTER—Mr. Gerald and Gentlemen:—The last time that I had the pleasure of attending a dinner of the Canadian Club I made a mild protest, as is my usual manner, against being considered as a permanent thanksgiver for the Club. I now beg to say that, in utter hopelessness, I resign any claim to further protest and advise

the Club that whenever it winds the crank on thanks business, all it has to do is to summons me. (Laughter.)

However, to-day it is a very happy task that I have to perform, however inadequately I may perform it. Sir George has given us as Canadians some things to think about, especially those of us Canadians who are apt to be a little too self-satisfied, because he has brought up a youngster from the far southern zone and he has given us some facts and some figures which make us, unless we had looked into them, revise our estimates of the exceedingly magnificent position that Canada occupies in comparison to the continent of Australia. He is an old politician, evidently (laughter). In his heart, you know, he meant to tell us, and he really did tell us, that Australia was bigger than Canada. But did you notice how he did it? He didn't say that it was bigger than Canada, and our *amour propre* is satisfied; but he said that it was a good deal bigger than the United States. (Laughter.) Then Sir George was anxious to draw us on the sheep question. We are a little bit shy on that, and I am not to be drawn; but I will tell Sir George this, that our last census was taken a year ago or so, and it is now under process of compilation, and in the period of about six years from the present date we will have all these individual instances of growth fully tabulated. If Sir George will enquire about that time, and I am living, I would be very happy to give him the information on the sheep question. (Laughter.)

SIR GEORGE REID—I don't know whether then you will have to send it up or down. (Laughter.)

HON MR. FOSTER—Well, there only is one other remark—not in contradiction to anything that Sir George Reid has said. He certainly has warmed all our hearts. He has given us by a personal application of beautiful language and of stirring thought, an idea of the country from which he comes, and the country which is a sister to our own. With equal heartiness we can appreciate and we can reciprocate the feelings of brotherliness and of respect and esteem, we for the Australians, that the Australians through his lips have told us they have for us, and when he goes back to Australia, after having seen something of our country, and speaks to his own kin

there, he can carry to them just as warm appreciations from Canada as his eloquent can tongue put into language. (Applause.)

Sir George is perplexing in some ways and has upset one other of my ideas. Quite naturally, you know, I took to the theory that, if one had a very big body, he could not have a very active brain. I tell you that naturally I inclined to that theory. (Laughter and applause.) In other words, that where too much goes to beef, too little goes to brains. The theory is no longer tenable, for if you generalize upon the specimen we have had here to-day beef and brains can go together and make most excellent companions. He led us out into a thoughtful frame of mind as to the British Empire, what it was, how it became so, and how it was to remain so, and he asked the Canadian statesman, or politician—which ever you choose to denominate it—to produce the scheme of Federation. Well, I would say to Sir George that I have never been, and am not now, bothering very much about the scheme. If a young man really loves a young woman, he is not very anxious to be told what scheme shall be adopted for him to bring about the consummation of his wishes.

A VOICE—Is that so?

HON. MR. FOSTER—Love, as Sir George himself well knows, finds its own means. (Hear, hear.) And so, if we have that abounding and abiding feeling of loyalty and oneness, neither he nor I will trouble very much (hear, hear) as to how the bond may be kept and made even firmer in the future. (Applause.)

Now, I am not going to detain you gentlemen any longer. I want to express my own, as I am sure I express your, deep appreciation of the privilege we have enjoyed to-day in listening to our distinguished friend from Australia. He is a distinguished man. He has taken a high place in the politics of that country. His mark remains on the history, and always will remain on the history, of that country. We like to know men; we like to see them before us; we like to hear them speak. To-day we have had a speech which we will not forget, put in language which we will long remember; and as that speech came from the heart of Sir George Reid and was

phrased in his own beautiful language, we shall not forget Sir George as long as we treasure the memory of his speech. (Loud applause.)

THE CHAIRMAN—Three cheers for our Australian brother, Sir George Reid.

These were heartily given, and the meeting closed with the singing of "God Save the King!"

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